

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
May 6, 2010

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Joan Golowich, Joel Gordon, Doris Holden, Rosemary Kofler, Mary Jane Laus, Juana Trujillo

Absent: Kathy Koplow, Barbara Sutherland

Select Board Liaison: Stephanie O'Keeffe

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services), Karen Erman (Administrative Assistant), Priscilla Robbins (Senior Aide Program)

Guests: Larry Shaffer (Town Manager), Barbara Slovin (President of the Friends of the Amherst SC); Evie Ross (Lunch Site Director); Sandra Lapollo (Director of Chicopee COA); Shirley Packard (SHAG member); Ellie Vanetzian (SHAG member)

Joan Logan, Jack Wollensak, Heidi Overby, Dick Stein, Judy Stein, Judy Fish, Richard Kofler, Sylvia Sherwood, Lillian Scott, Ed Toole, Bea Dragon, Bob Johnston, Elaine Fligman, Alan Root, Elaine State, Estelle Dugas, Leslie Arriola, Saul Gladstone, Virginia Senders, Irving Howard, Ebrahim Jalali, Esther Schneier.

Scott Merzbach (Gazette Reporter)

Welcome: Dan Clapp, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 9:05 AM.

Minutes of Previous Meeting: The minutes of the April 1, 2010 meeting were approved and accepted.

Friends' Treasurer Report:

Doris provided a handout showing \$16,987.03 in the checking account and \$71,764.56 in the investment account.

A preliminary report from the First Annual Amherst Follies shows a net of a little over \$4000.

Karen reported contributions to the Friends for FY10 as \$11,513.00, of which \$8,875.00 has been since the December solicitation. The Treasurer's report was accepted.

CONTINUING BUSINESS

Friends Report on the Follies:

Barbara Slovin reported that the Follies was most successful. One attendee was heard saying, "This is the best ten dollars I ever spent". We were extremely fortunate to have Donna Lee create and direct the program. It was a major project and all members of the Friends took an active role in making it happen. People left the show with a very positive feeling.

Dan preempted the next topic with a comment about an article that appeared in yesterday's Gazette regarding new clerical office space at the Bangs. It stated that a sub-committee had approved this as an efficiency it could offer. Dan: "that is a significant misunderstanding and I would like to clarify that." Minutes of the last (April) meeting state: "Our sub-committee thinks it would be possible to have a single person at a reception desk who could fill the needs of both the Senior Center and the Health Department. The first floor could accommodate the offices and other needs of these two departments, but it would be virtually impossible to include LSSE on that floor as well." That was in reference to a discussion of space and incorporating all three departments on one floor. We had not discussed at that time the use of clerical space in the entrance lobby because that had not been presented before. We are concerned about that possibility because it does not increase efficiency or effectiveness. It does not offer cost savings. How can you beat 'free'? At our present reception desk we use volunteers. It would sacrifice effectiveness because it would take our administrative/program assistant out of the work of the Senior Center and put her in a clerical suite away from the office. That would negatively affect Senior Center services and performance. Karen is not just a clerical assistant. She is a program assistant and works intimately with Nancy in integrating all of the various activities including responding to seniors with concerns. Our subcommittee did not promote or recommend a plan for a clerical suite.

Conversation with Larry:

Larry: "You just gave my report Mr. Chairman." Last week Larry met with Nancy Pagano, Julie Federman, Linda Chalfant, Kay Zlogar, Kris Pacunas (IT Director) and Ron Bohonowicz (Facilities Director). He asked them to look at the Bangs lobby space and try and put together a physical plan for a reception center for joint clerical, joint program scheduling, joint publication, joint copying, joint phone, security and direction services. It would create new space in an area that would provide coverage for the entire building. Cost and construction are being considered. Larry has to be concerned about all three departments in the building – each being important. There is considerable overlap with their programs so Larry is considering ways in which resources from all three departments can be brought together to meet mutual needs the departments might have in a comprehensive, coalition type of perspective. The clerical suite utilizing new space is part of that plan.

Dan: "Is it scheduled for construction?"

Larry said that many things have to happen before one even talks of construction – a feasibility study must be done to determine how it will impact the building, if it is structurally possible, if it will meet codes, what the cost will be.

Dan expressed concern for the lack of heat in that area and drafts from the door opening frequently. He is also concerned about privacy issues for seniors standing in line with others and divulging personal information. Could the Senior Center maintain its own reception desk on the first floor, having the clerical suite used just for the Health Department and LSSE?

Leslie Arriola sees Larry's idea as being concerned with the 'physical element' but it is not addressing the 'human element'.

Larry said if that means "person to person" contact, there are no plans to reduce that. In fact, it would provide more resources to provide that human need. We are not talking about diminishing departments. We are talking about increasing their capabilities through consolidation. We are looking at ways to eliminate duplication and to increase efficiency in the pedestrian activities in order to free up 'person power' for higher order activities. Larry sees clerical, phone, greeting and copying as pedestrian activities that can be done anywhere. We no longer have the resources to think about things in department-by-department silos, so we need to look for opportunities to make connections between each department.

Alan Root said he has received many phone calls over the past few months from seniors who are irate. There is frequent use of the metaphor 'we aren't sardines'. There is talk about 'a loss of space' and the expression of 'us and them'. Seniors say "we are paying taxes to support the schools with hardly a murmur of discontent and what we get back is a lot less". Some people think we should have a Town Meeting devoted entirely to this issue of consolidation.

With regard to the clerical suite, Alan said that in any professional office he has been to, the 'guts' of the operation (clerical activities) is hidden. When one enters a facility the reception area is welcoming and spacious. The proposed clerical suite at Bangs would be too small.

The people who are retired are probably a key to our economic development. They retire here, buy homes and pay into the system. They have never used their economic muscle to affect conditions at the Senior Center. All three departments at Bangs need to be asking questions and coming up with constructive ideas for change, keeping in mind some of the changes the Town Manager has spoken about. Alan plans to contact various groups using a questionnaire and then have a general meeting of the users of Bangs.

Barbara Slovin is concerned with seniors approaching a desk in a clerical suite and having to answer personal questions in the presence of others in the open lobby. As a former social worker, Barbara is aware that private conversation needs to be kept private in many situations - financial need, for instance.

Ellie Vanetzian asked if there were other options being considered besides the clerical suite. We do not want to see senior services that are being so well utilized diminished and changed in any way.

Nancy responded. In the meetings with department heads and Kay Zlogar, most of the focus has been on Larry's plans. Nancy did submit an alternative plan to leave LSSE in its current space, to reconfigure senior center offices to accommodate health department staff and maintain our receptionist. It would keep our staff close, the copy center is accessible, there would be little expense and there would be increased efficiencies. The department heads and Kay have not discussed Nancy's plan yet. They have been discussing the pros and cons of Larry's plan. Nothing is set in stone. Cost about various plans has

not been discussed yet. The Town Manager wants to have a clear evaluation and to be transparent with the COA and seniors.

Larry: "There is no one more concerned about costs than I am". The Senior Center budget has been approved by Town Meeting. Now we need to start planning for next year which will be every bit as bad as this year. The Governor is projecting deficits for next year of between \$2-4 billion. For the Town of Amherst, that translates into a reduction of revenue roughly equivalent to what we saw last year. We have to think about what we will do in that case. I can't just think about one department. I have to think about the entire town and look for opportunities for how we can survive another awful year. My job is to make sure we provide services to the people of this town and to do that as efficiently and effectively as possible even with the cuts. We need to look at what our options are now or end up in an emergency situation. Looking at things is not planning and firming things up. I ask you to keep an open mind. Lets all work together for a stronger Senior Center, notwithstanding what happens to us with revenue next year.

Sandra Lapollo, Director of Chicopee COA, re-stated that if an elder comes in and is asked for personal information in a public space, that person will leave and never return. It would be helpful for a person in the clerical suite to direct a senior to the reception desk upstairs. We have about 30 seconds to engage an elder at our senior center. If they walk in and are not greeted, do not see their peers and do not see activities, they do not feel welcome. They will leave. This is a philosophy that is being looked at nationally. People need to feel that they are part of something, part of a center.

Looking at costs, nothing is more cost-effective than the Council on Aging because they utilize so many volunteers to provide the services. When they make contact with that older adult, that elder takes better care of themselves, exercises, or has better mental health and that actually reduces the cost to the fire and police departments. For example, in teaching an elder to have better balance, that elder is less likely to fall and will be less likely to have to call the paramedics. Cutting services in one area may mean increasing costs elsewhere.

Dan asked if Room 101 is still being considered for a teen center.

Nancy met with Linda, Bonnie Isman and Kevin Joy. They determined that Room 101 would not be an adequate space for teens. They all agreed that the teens that are causing difficulties at the Library now do not want to have the supervision that would be necessary in a public space. We do provide a pool table which teens use and the Boys and Girls Club has activities for teens.

Heidi Overby spoke of the loss, loneliness, isolation and invisibility of elders living in public housing. We don't complain – we adjust. We ask that you listen to us. You have a financial issue. We have a human issue.

Saul Gladstone expressed fear of losing Room 101 as a meeting space. He has been meeting with a group in that room for 2 hours each Wednesday since 1991. Seniors do not like change.

Dan reminded us that change is coming. We have the opportunity to direct the change so that it won't interfere with efficiency or effectiveness.

Larry said he appreciates the opportunity to be at COA meetings. He is available to the COA and the senior community. He is committed to being successful.

NEW BUSINESS

Ferne Finger:

Nancy spoke of Ferne's sudden death on April 19. Ferne had a huge presence at the Senior Center and gave more volunteers hours than anyone else. She was a big part of our personal lives and of the lives of those who used the Senior Center.

Nancy introduced **Evelyn Ross**. She was trained by Ferne and is the new HVES Site Director. 'Evie' is a retired sheriff/correctional officer.

Priscilla (Tasha) Robbins:

Nancy said that Tasha, our Senior Aide, has fulfilled her one year at the Senior Center, but since she will move to LSSE we will not lose her friendship. Tasha has been a tremendous help with statistics, data entry, food programs and the convalescent closet.

Jack Wollensak has volunteered to work 2 hours each afternoon to take over the responsibilities of Tasha.

Lauren Srey ("Ren") the Cambodian outreach worker, formerly with the Health Department, will begin working 5-10 hours per week in the Senior Center office now that the Health Department is

divesting itself of social service programs. Ren will work under her own Grant money focusing on elders.

Stephanie O’Keeffe added that the Town Manager would like to take funding for human service agencies off of the General Fund budget and move them to other funding sources. It is, however, “a stated priority of the Select Board that the Town maintains a profile in senior services”. It is crucial to Amherst as a retirement community to provide core services to seniors.

SUB-COMMITTEE UPDATE

Ad Hoc Survey Committee:

Joel reported. The 2010 Survey is complete. We need to look at ways to make the results more widely available, appreciated, and made use of by Town officials and businesses.

Rosemary added: we need to look at how we can move forward with the information and how to plan for the future. She suggested the current Ad Hoc Committee continues with that work. She suggested a verbal presentation of the survey results, perhaps to the Select Board and the public. Stephanie agreed and assured us the Select Board will get printed copies of the survey. The Survey is on the Town website. It was suggested the “Top Points” be moved to the beginning of the article in order to engage readers.

Mary Jane would also like to put a presentation on ACTV.

Dan suggested at the next COA meeting we announce a new sub-committee to deal with the recommendations of the survey committee.

COA Nominating Committee FY11:

The fiscal year ends June 30. **Dan, Joel, Mary Jane, and Doris** volunteered to be on the Nominating Committee.

SHAG (Senior Health Advisory Group):

Dan reported. Joel Feinman, CEO of Valley Medical, made a presentation at this morning’s meeting on the ‘medical home’ and the importance of primary care. That relates to past discussions about having better continuity and integration of health care from the doctor’s office to the hospital to the lab, etc. The three aspects of the medical home movement are 1) the coordination of the various sites of care 2) the technology of having medical records available on the Internet for emergency access 3) payment for care given, not for procedures done.

Highland Valley Elder Services:

Joan reported. The last meeting focused on Protective Services. The COA is one of the mandated reporters. Self-abuse, elder abuse and hoarding are all reportable. Maura and Juana do report elders when appropriate and HVES will see that person for an evaluation. However, if that person does not agree to be evaluated and if there is no imminent danger, the case is dropped. June 15 is “Elder Abuse Awareness Day”. We are encouraged to wear purple.

Dan spoke of a Patient Advocacy class by the UMass School of Public Health held at the Ann Whalen House. They utilize ‘patient navigators’ - students who volunteer to work with seniors to help them navigate the medical system.

STAFF REPORTS

Update on “Ageless” and Bank of Exchange Dinner:

Maura reported. Work with Amherst College visiting artists Wendy Ewald and Rick Lowe focusing on non-monetary exchanges continues. They created the “Bank of Exchanges” – bartering of services. Bessie Young has developed the “Ageless Dinners”. She accesses the funds for the dinners and does the planning and execution. On April 23 she had an intergenerational dinner at Amherst College at which about 35 elders attended along with about 45 students – a wonderful evening. At that dinner, Wendy explained the Bank of Exchange program and the Blue Stockings acappella group sang. The COA Secretary will send a letter of thanks to Bessie Young.

Wendy will have her Collaborative Art class again in the fall. It will be open to seniors.

The COA meeting adjourned at 10:50 AM.

The next meeting of the COA will be held on June 3, 2010 at 9:00 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary

The approved minutes of the April 1, 2010 meeting were delivered to the Select Board Office to be filed.